

Health Care Authority switch from interpreter brokers to new medical interpreter system begins September 1

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OLYMPIA – A new system for coordinating state-supported medical interpreters and allowing for video or telephonic interpreter services will officially go into effect on September 1.

The new system is designed to let providers exercise clinical judgment about the level of interpreter presence they need – from in-person to telephone or video. Providers ultimately will be able to make their interpreter arrangements over the phone as well as on line.

The successful bidder on the new contract – CTS Language Link – is based in Vancouver, Wash. CTS Language Link will be better positioned for statewide operations than the previous regional brokers and can offer a single statewide point of contact to deal with providers and interpreters.

A two-week overlap is planned in order to give providers and the new contractor a little breathing room to phase in the change. CTS will begin scheduling on or around September 1st for September appointments. It will be in charge of the entire operation by mid-September.

The federal requirement for interpreters is built into civil rights law and gives providers the ultimate responsibility for making sure they can adequately communicate with patients whose care is funded by Medicaid. Washington State is one of about a dozen states that have programs to assist health care providers dealing with patients of Limited English Proficiency and share the cost of those language services.

The medical interpreters are certified by the state Department of Social and Health services (DSHS) Language Testing and Certification (LTC) program.

The new system was effectively ordered by the Legislature, which directed the Health Care Authority to achieve 32 percent savings in the current biennium by reducing administrative and direct service costs of the interpreter program.

Total cost of the program in the 2009-11 biennium was \$29 million.

In response, the agency developed a contract requiring the successful bidder to utilize web-based/online technology for processing, scheduling, assigning and managing requests for interpreters for all types of interpreting modalities: in-person, over the phone (OPI) and video remote interpreting (VRI).

The interpreter system will also be used by Health Care Authority's sister agency, the Department of Social and Health Services, in arranging interpreter services for DSHS clients who are Limited English Proficient. HCA estimates that part of DSHS interpreter services will make up about 10 percent of the total interpreter jobs arranged by CTS.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR BACKGROUND:

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